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OHIO LEATHER WORKS

VANDICATOR  
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## Construction schedule causes deal to crumble

*The partnership needs seven years to develop 10 acres of the Ohio Leather Works property, its general manager says.*

By TIM YOMICH  
VANDICATOR TRUMBULL STAFF

**GIRARD** -- The agreement in which the city would have gained ownership of the Ohio Leather Works property fell apart because of the construction timetable.

The schedule for Leatherworks Partnership to develop the land was "not satisfactory," Atty. Joseph Rafidi, partnership general manager, said Friday.

"They didn't feel they could meet it," Rafidi said of the partners, Gordon Schaff and Ralph Carestia, both of the Washington, D.C., area.

Schaff, Rafidi said, had given his approval of the settlement agreement, but Carestia is the financier and raised questions about the timing of construction on the 27 acres along U.S. Route 422.

Rafidi had said he would recommend approval to Carestia.

The city had filed a foreclosure action in Trumbull County Common Pleas Court against Leatherworks Partnership.

**Money dispute:** The city says the company owes it more than \$200,000 in fines because of zoning violations and \$75,000 for demolishing a building on the site after a 1995 fire because it had become a safety hazard.

The timetable called for Leatherworks Partnership to break ground for construction of a building in two years and complete it in a year.

If environmental problems cropped up on the land, the company would receive a six-month extension.

"They didn't feel they could meet it," Rafidi said of the construction schedule, noting the partner were looking at seven years for construction.

On Tuesday, the partnership was supposed to give the city the deed to the property and \$25,000 as a partial payment for the demolition work.

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**Instruction on lawsuit:** When that didn't happen, Mayor James Melfi instructed Atty. Richard Zellers of Youngstown to go forward with the lawsuit.

Rafidi acknowledged Melfi negotiated the settlement in good faith. The mayor wanted to hold the company's "feet to the fire" to assure work got under way.

But he said the partners have constructed buildings around the country and are familiar with the

time it takes.

"I can see both sides," Rafidi said.

Rafidi said he believes Melfi would have worked with the partnership if added construction time was needed, but pointed out Melfi will not always be mayor.

Rafidi said the partnership has spent \$360,000 to purchase the property and retain an architect. He noted the building that burned was not insured because it was vacant, making the premiums too expensive.